

Message Text

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ORIGIN NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 R

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DRAFTED BY:S/S-O:LFLEISCHER

APPROVED BY:S/S-O:LFLEISCHER

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TO WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 247432

NODIS

FOR BRZEZINSKI ONLY

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 6493 ACTION SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
OCT 15

QUOTE: S E C R E T DAMASCUS 6493

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PPDC, SY, US

SUBJ: MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO PRESIDENT ASSAD

REF: STATE 246487

1. SUMMARY:

PRESENTED CARTER'S MESSAGE FOR ASSAD AND WORKING PAPER
TO KHADDAM OCTOBER 14. FONMIN'S REACTION WAS FIRM BUT NOT
HOSTILE. HE TERMED NEW PAPER "CLEAR RETREAT" FROM ORIGINAL
VERSION AND DESCRIBED IT AS TAKING ONLY ISRAELI CONCERNS

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INTO ACCOUNT. SOUGHT ASSURANCE USG DID NOT CONSIDER LATEST
VERSION TO BE FINAL ONE. ASSURED HIM WE READY STUDY ARAB
SUGGESTIONS IN EFFORT DEVELOP ACCEPTABLE MIDDLE GROUND.
EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE GETTING TO GENEVA AS QUICKLY AS
POSSIBLE AND REASONS WHY ARABS SHOULD NOT DELAY OVER
PROCEDURAL ISSUES. KHADDAM PROMISED HAVE ASSAD'S REPLY IN
FEW DAYS. I RECOMMEND SUGGESTION TO FAHMY HE CONVOKE EARLY

SYRO-JORDANIAN-EGYPTIAN FONMIN MEETING TO HELP KEEP SYRIANS IN LINE. BETTER YET WOULD BE TO HAVE SAUDIS SPONSOR THE CONSULTATION. END SUMMARY.

2. ON RECEIPT REFTEL MORNING OCTOBER 14, REQUESTED MEETING WITH ASSAD TO CONVEY MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER AND COPY OF NEW WORKING PAPER. PRESIDENCY REPLIED AFTERNOON ASKING I MEET WITH FONMIN KHADDAM SINCE PRESIDENT'S SCHEDULE FOR THAT DAY WAS TOO FULL TO PERMIT MEETING. HAD ONE HOUR SESSION WITH KHADDAM IN LATE AFTERNOON.

3. AFTER CONVEYING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, SAID I WISHED CLAIRIFY BEFORE WE PROCEEDED TO WORKING PAPER THAT WHILE ISRAELIS HAD AGREED TO ITS CONTENT, IT WAS OUR SUGGESTED PROCEDURE, NOT A JOINT U.S.-ISRAELI PROPOSAL. AFTER HEARING WORKING PAPER, KHADDAM'S FIRST QUESTION WAS WHY DID THIS VERSION DIFFER SO FUNDAMENTALLY FROM THE ONE PRESENTED TO HIM IN WASHINGTON; REPLIED IT REPRESENTED RECASTING OF OUR THOUGHTS AS RESULT OF CONTINUING TALKS WITH PARTIES. WE HAD AWAITED DAYAN'S RETURN TO ISRAEL AND HIS SECURING CLEAR CABINET APPROVAL OF THE PAPER BEFORE CIRCULATING IT TO THE ARAB PARTIES. THIS WAS OUR LATEST ATTEMPT TO DEFINE MIDDLE GROUND ON WHICH ALL PARTIES MIGHT AGREE SO WE COULD MOVE TO GENEVA AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. KHADDAM THEN ASKED WHETHER THE FIRST WORKING PAPER HAD REPRESENTED AMERICAN OR ISRAELI PROPOSALS. REPLIED THAT
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IN BOTH CASES WE WERE PRESENTING AMERICAN PROPOSALS. WHY THEN, HE ASKED, HAD WE DECIDED TO ELIMINATE MENTION OF PLO AND CUT OUT PROVISION FOR WORKING GROUP TO REPORT TO PLENARY. REPLIED THAT NO PARTY HAD FOUND OUR ORIGINAL FORMULATION OF "NOT WELL-KNOWN PLO REPRESENTATIVES" TO BE SATISFACTORY AND NOTED PRESIDENT CARTER IN HIS LETTER HAS REITERATED HIS BELIEF IN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR PLENARY.

4. COMMENTED THAT SINCE RETURNING TO DAMASCUS I HAD BEEN DISTURBED BY COMMENTS OF SOME SYRIAN FRIENDS AND IN LOCAL MEDIA TO THE EFFECT CARTER HAD RETREATED FROM THE PRINCIPLES DISCUSSED WITH ASSAD IN GENEVA AND FROM THOSE SET FORTH IN THE OCTOBER 1 U.S.-SOVIET DECLARATION. (DAMASCUS 6485 DETAILS LATEST PRESS ATTACKS.) SAID KHADDAM WAS WITNESS TO INTENSITY OF THE DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES IN NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON SINCE LATE SEPTEMBER AND PLETHORA OF SPEECHES AND COMMENTARIES RESULTING. HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO BASIS TO READ INTO THIS WORKING PAPER, OR ANY OTHER U.S. DOCUMENT, A SHIFT AWAY FROM THE BASIC PRINCIPLES CARTER HAS CONSISTENTLY ENUNCIATED AS NECESSARY TO A JUST MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. EVERY STATEMENT WE HAVE MADE AND EVERY PICE OF PAPER WE HAVE PRODUCED HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO MOVE THE PEACE PROCESS

FORWARD. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT HE FELT IT WAS THE "AVERAGE SYRIAN CITIZEN," RATHER THAN RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS IN DAMASCUS, WHO HAD COMPLAINED ABOUT CHANGES IN THE VARIOUS PUBLIC FORMULATIONS OF AMERICAN OFFICIALS OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS. HOWEVER, NOW HAVING READ THE REVISED WORKING PAPER, HE HAD TO SAY HIS OWN INITIAL REACTION WAS THAT IT CONSTITUTED A CLEAR RETREAT FROM THE FIRST VERSION. I REITERATED FIRMLY THERE WAS NO RETREAT. TOOK THIS OPENING TO RECALL THAT FONMIN HAD HAD RINGSIDE SEAT IN NEW YORK TO VIEW THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN U.S. DOMESTIC OPINION AND OFFICIAL FOREIGN POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS. OUR JOINT STATEMENT WITH THE SOVIETS HAD AROUSED HOSTILITY AMONG ANTI-COMMUNIST ELEMENTS IN THE U.S., WHILE THE PRESIDENT'S CITING THE "LEGITIMATE RIGHTS" OF PALESTINIANS HAD STIMULATED DEEP
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ANXIETY AMONG U.S. SUPPORTERS OF ISRAEL. ADDED THAT IF RESUMPTION OF CONFERENCE IS LONG DELAYED, CARTER RISKS HAVING EACH OF HIS STATEMENTS AND EACH PRINCIPLE HE VISUALIZES AS NECESSARY FOR THE SETTLEMENT CRITIQUED IN ISOLATION, WHERE THEY WILL BE SUBJECTED TO DISTORTION, RATHER THAN BEING PERCEIVED AS PART OF AN OVERALL APPROACH TO A JUST PEACE. HE WILL BE EXPOSING HIMSELF TO CHEAP POLITICAL SMEARS SUCH AS "CARTER INTENDS HAND OVER THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE SOVIETS" OR "LEGITIMIZE THE PLO TERRORIST-MURDERERS."

5. AFTER FUTHER STUDY OF REVISED WORKING PAPER, KHADDAM ASKED WHETHER MENTION OF JEWISH REFUGEES WAS U.S. OR ISRAELI IDEA. SAID I DID NOT SPECIFICALLY KNOW, BUT WAS AWARE THAT ISRAELIS FOR LONG TIME PAST HAVE MADE CLEAR THEY INTENDED RAISE THIS SUBJECT TO MEPC CONTEXT. HE CONFINED SELF TO OBSERVATION THAT JEWISH REFUGEES WERE NOT DRIVEN FROM ARAB LANDS AND, UNLIKE PALESTINIANS, HAD RIGHT OF RETURN.

6. KHADDAM THEN CLAIMED THE REVISED WORKING PAPER INCLUDES EVERYTHING OF CONCERN TO THE ISRAELIS, "ALL THEIR IDEAS AND SLOGANS." WHY, HE ASKED, IS NO MENTION MADE OF ARAB CONCERNS SUCH AS THE RIGHT OF RETURN AND TO ESTABLISH A PALESTINIAN STATE IN ACCORDANCE UN RES. 181? SUGGESTED HE VIEW THIS REVISED PAPER AS OUR ATTEMPT TO TIE DOWN ONE ASPECT OF A HIGHLY COMPLEX NEGOTIATION PROCESS; REVISED PAPER HAD ISRAELI AGREEMENT. WE WERE NOW TURNING TO THE ARAB PARTIES TO SEE WHAT IF ANYTHING WOULD BE NEEDED TO MAKE THESE PROPOSALS GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE.

7. KHADDAM ASKED WHETHER AFTER GETTING ARAB REACTIONS TO THE REVISED PAPER WE WILL BE PREPARED TO GO BACK TO ISRAELIS FOR POSSIBLE REVISIONS. I ASSURED HIM WE WERE READY TO DO SO; WE
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WILL CAREFULLY STUDY SUGGESTIONS WHICH ARAB SIDE CONSIDERS VITAL FOR INCLUSION. UNDERLINED, HOWEVER, PRESIDENT'S DESIRE THAT WE ALL AVOID BEING PARALYZED BY MINOR DIFFERENCES ON PROCEDURE. THRUST OF CARTER'S PRESENT LETTER WAS THAT USG CAN PLAY ITS MOST EFFECTIVE ROLE IN ADVANCING THE CAUSE OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE WITHIN GENEVA CONTEXT AND THAT SYRIA SHOULD DO ITS PART SO WE MAY ALL MOVE AHEAD QUICKLY. WE AGREE WITH SYRIA THAT GENEVA IS NO END IN ITSELF. BUT PERHAPS SYRIANS MAY ALSO AGREE THAT THERE IS NO ONE BEST WAY TO ORGANIZE THE CONFEREND. SAID, FOR EXAMPLE, NO WRITTEN FORMULA WILL IN AND OF ITSELF GUARANTEE EITHER THE UNITY OR THE DIVISION OF THE ARABS AT THE NEGOTIATIONS. THIS IS A MATTER OF THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE ARABS THEMSELVES APPROACH THE CONFERENCE.

8. REMINDED KHADDAM THAT CARTER HAD ASSURED HIM HE INTENDS REMAIN COMMITTED TO WORK FOR JUST MIDDLE EAST PEACE THROUGHOUT HIS PRESIDENCY, AND THAT SYRIANS HAD EARLIER AGREED WITH PRESIDENT FURTHER PASSAGE OF TIME COULD ONLY RENDER SUCCESS OF NEGOTIATIONS MORE PROBLEMATICAL. WE BELIEVE THAT A MIDDLE GROUND CAN BE FOUND OVER A WORKING PAPER TO ALLOW RESUMPTION OF GENEVA. WE HOPED FOR EARLY REPLY FROM SYRIANS AND I KNEW PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE WOULD BE GIVEN THE MOST CAREFUL CONSIDERATION. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT HE ANTICIPATED BEING BACK IN TOUCH WITH ME IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS WITH "THE REPLY OF ASSAD AND THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT." NOTED THAT PRESIDENT HAD DIRECTED HIM TO HAVE FULL TRANSCRIPT OF OUR MEETING DELIVERED TO HIM THAT SAME EVENING. HE OBSERVED THAT VISIT OF INDONESIAN PRESIDENT SUHARTO, WHO ARRIVES OCTOBER 15 FOR TWO DAY VISIT, WOULD DELAY ANSWER SLIGHTLY. REPLIED IN NEGATIVE TO QUESTION WHETHER THERE WAS YET ANY DATE FIXED FOR HIM TO MEET WITH EGYPTIAN AND JORDANIAN FORMINS.

9. COMMENT:

KHADDAM MOVED IN ON THOSE CHANGES IN THE REVISED WORKING
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PAPER WHICH HE ALL BUT SAID REFLECTED AN UNACCEPTABLY PRO-ISRAELI BIAS. BUT HIS RECEPTION OF LETTER AND PRESENTATION WAS BY NO MEANS HOSTILE. HIS PRINCIPAL CONCERN WAS TO GET ASSURANCE THAT WE DID NOT CONSIDER WORKING PAPER LANGUAGE TO BE ALREADY SET IN CONCRETE AND THAT VIEWS OF SYRIANS AND OTHER ARABS WOULD BE GIVEN SERIOUS CONSIDERATION.

10. I AM STUCH BY ABSENCE OF INDICATIONS THAT SIGNIFICANT
INTER-ARAB COORDINATION OCCURRED IN NEW YORK AND EVEN MORE
BY KHADDAM'S VAGUENESS ABOUT ARRANGEMENTS TO MEET WITH
COLLEAGUES NOW THAT ALL HAVE RETURNED TO AREA. SUGGEST
CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO STIMULATING FAHMY TO CONVOKE AN
SYRO-JORDIAN-EGYPTIAN FONMIN MEETING TO SPEED UP CONSULTATION
PROCESS. SUCH MEETING, HOPEFULLY, COULD HELP DISCOURAGE SYRIANS
FROM INDULGING SELVES IN UNILATERAL DEMANDS FOR HARSHER
LANGUAGE, ULTIMATELY UNACCEPTABLE TO ISRAELIS, IN NEXT REVISION
OF WORKING PAPER. BETTER YET WOULD BE TO HAVE SAUDIS SPONSOR,
IF NOT ACTUALLY CHAIR, THE CONSULTATIONS SO THEY MIGHT FORESTALL
ERUPTION OF ALL TOO FAMILIAR SYRO-EGYPTIAN RIVALRIES.

11. SUGGEST PASS AMMAN, CAIRO AND TEL AVIV.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENT, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, PAPERS, CAT-B, DIPLOMATIC COMMUNICATIONS, NEGOTIATIONS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 15-Oct-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE247432
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: O:LFLEISCHER
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: N770006-0462
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From: STATE
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Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771056/aaaabvvs.tel
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Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Office: ORIGIN NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: NODIS, ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS, ONLY
Reference: 77 STATE 246487
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 905921
Secure: LOCK1
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO PRESIDENT ASSAD
TAGS: PPDC, SY, US, XF, (CARTER, JIMMY), (ASSAD)
To: WHITE HOUSE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9087422e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009